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Saxton

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(54) **HIGH STRENGTH LOW FRICTION
ENGINEERED MATERIAL FOR BEARINGS
AND OTHER APPLICATIONS**

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
None
See application file for complete search history.

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

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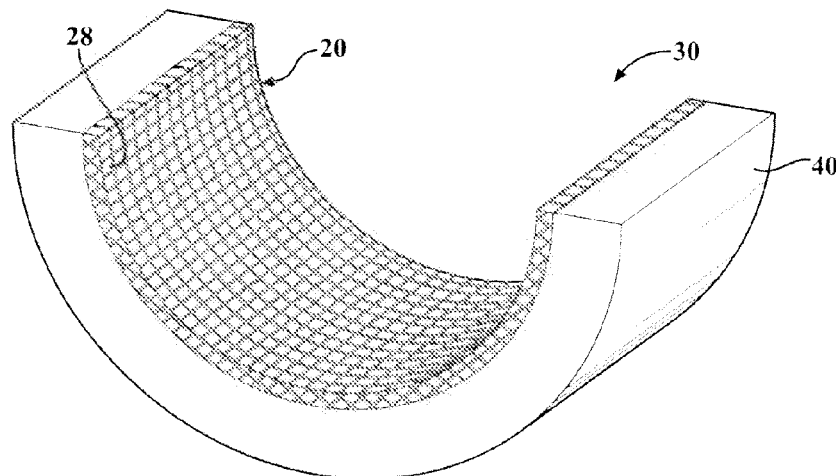
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A high strength, low friction engineered material includes a low friction material filling interstices of a metal microlattice. The metal typically comprises 5 volume % to 25 volume % and the interstices typically comprise 75 volume % to 95 volume %, based on the total volume of the metal microlattice and the interstices. The low friction material preferably fills 100 volume % of the interstices. The metal microlattice can be formed of a single layer, or multiple layers, for example layers of nickel, copper, and tin. The low friction material is typically a polymer, such as polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE), polyamide (PAI), polyetheretherketone (PEEK), polyethylene (PE), or polyoxymethylene (POM). The low friction material can also include additive particles to modify the material properties. The engineered material can be used in various automotive applications, for example as a bearing, or non-automotive applications.

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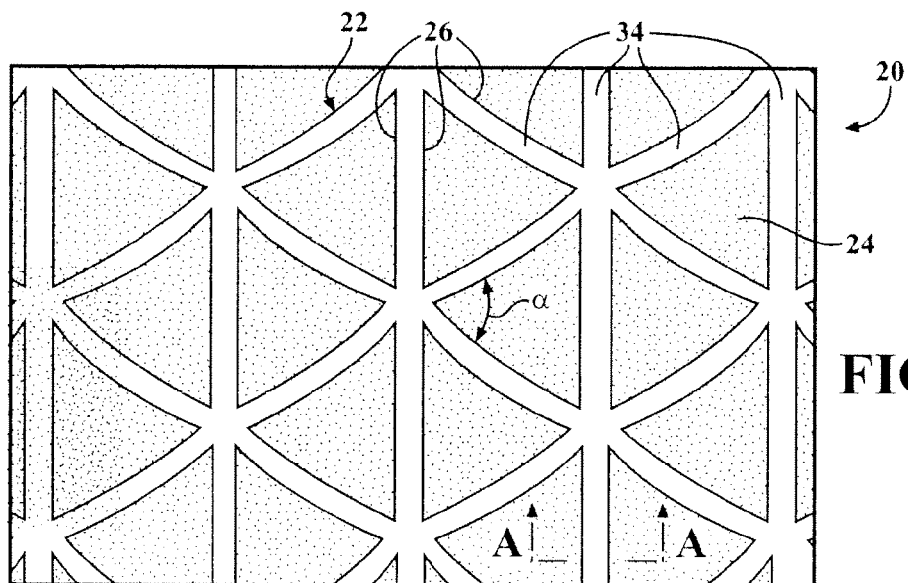


FIG. 1

FIG. 1A

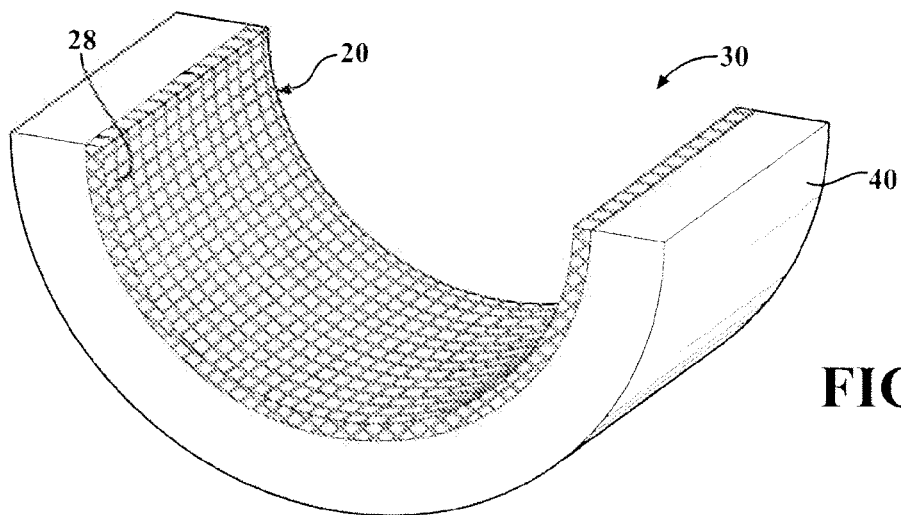
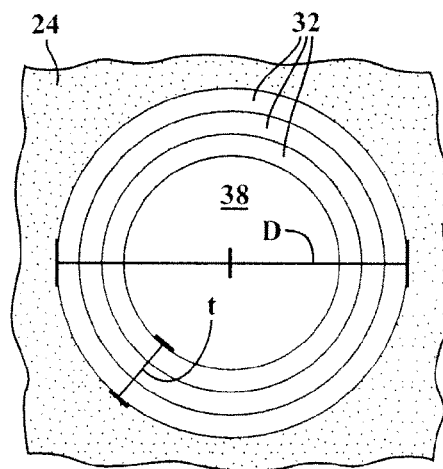
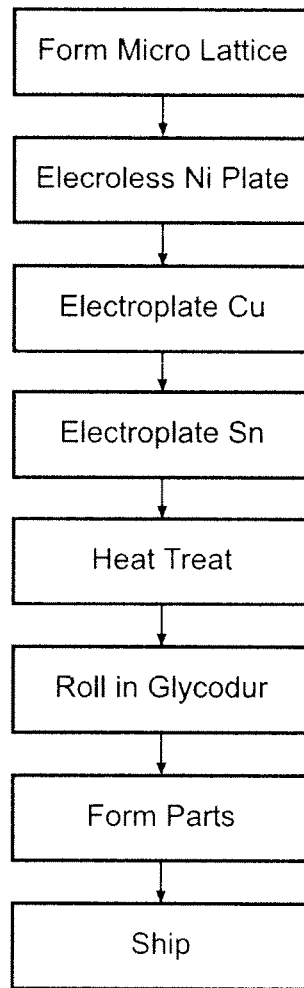
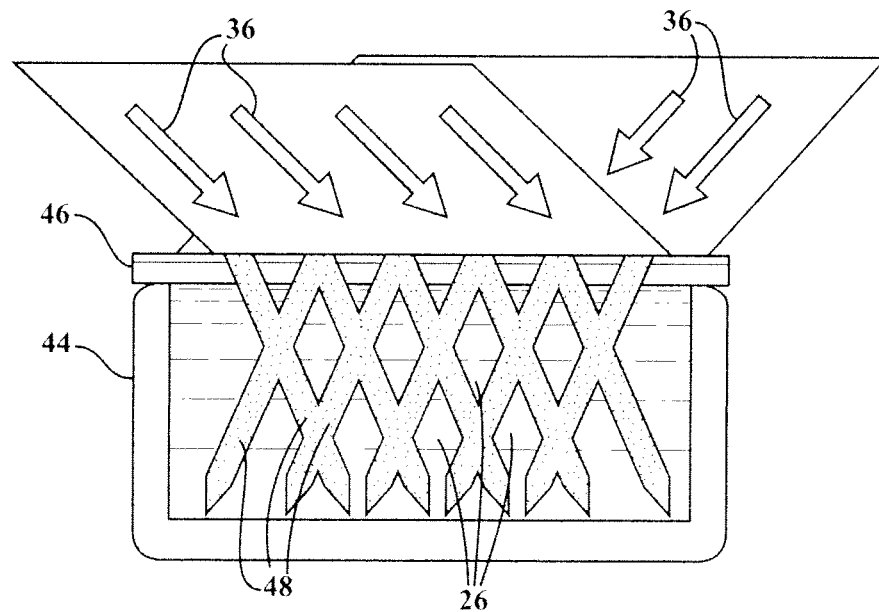


FIG. 2

FIG. 3**FIG. 4**

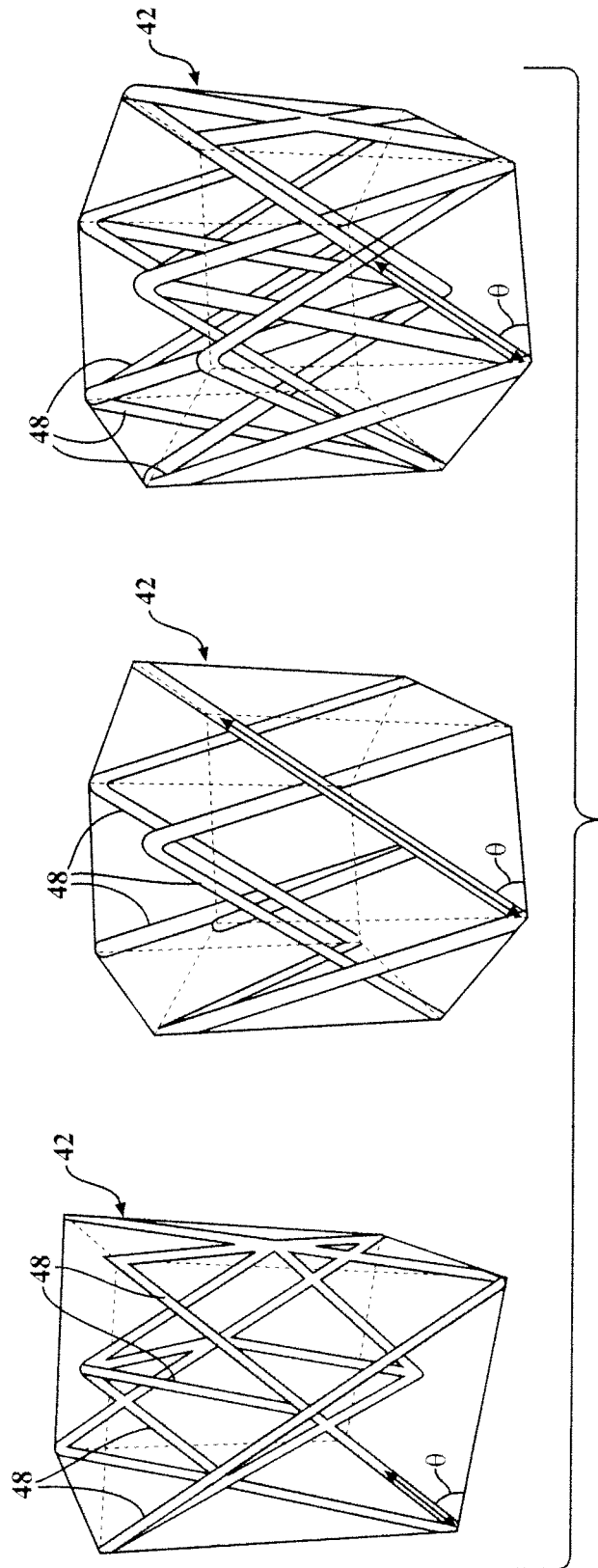


FIG. 5

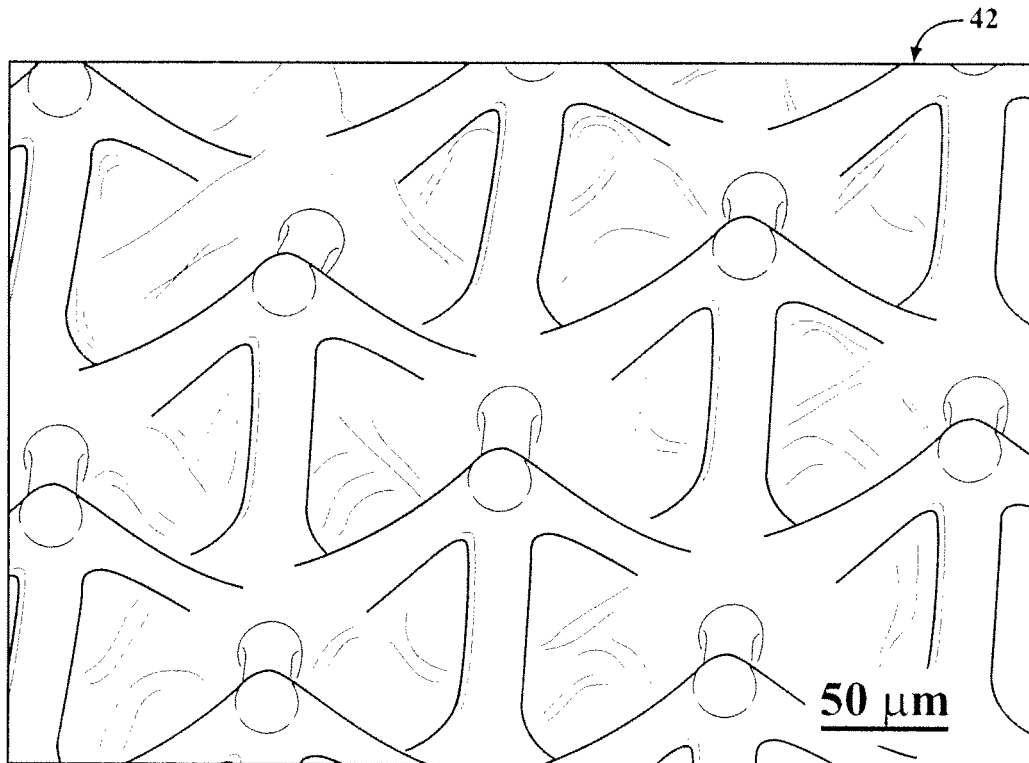


FIG. 6

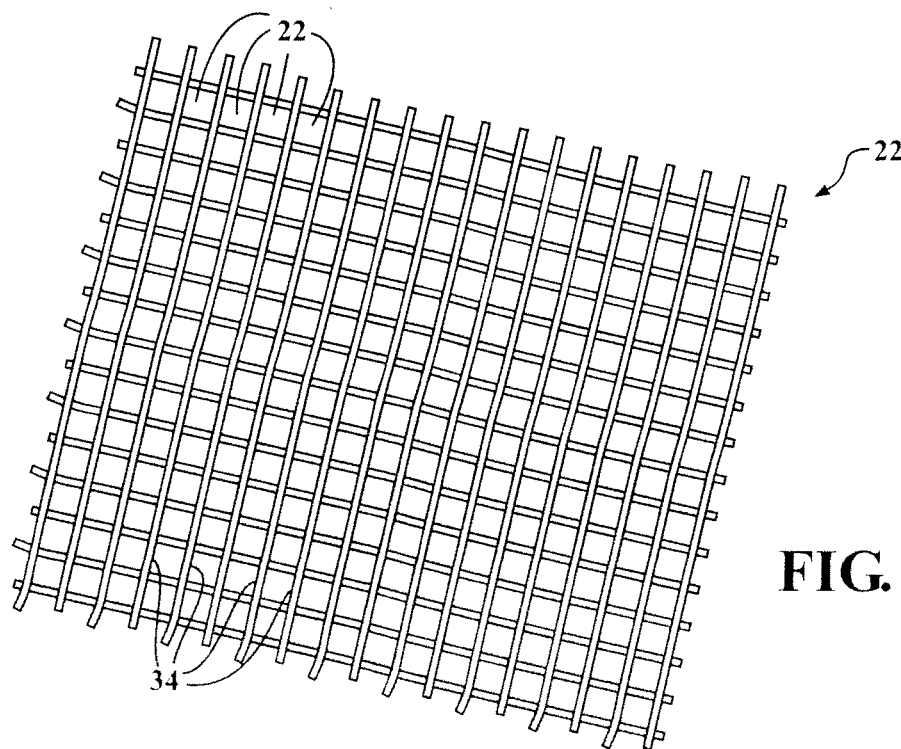


FIG. 7

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HIGH STRENGTH LOW FRICTION ENGINEERED MATERIAL FOR BEARINGS AND OTHER APPLICATIONS

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application claims the benefit of U.S. provisional patent application Ser. No. 61/728,315, filed Nov. 20, 2012, and U.S. provisional patent application Ser. No. 61/815,480, filed Apr. 24, 2013, the entire contents of which are hereby incorporated by reference in their entirety.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The invention relates generally to engineered materials, and more particularly to high strength, low friction materials, and methods of forming the same.

2. Related Art

Polymer materials are useful in many applications where two surfaces meet and need to match, such as bearings, gaskets, seals, wipers, and similar applications. Polymer materials provide good conformability, despite any wear, defects, or unplanned conditions, and also provide low friction, which permits the two surfaces to slide against one another with low forces and very little heat. Another advantage provided by polymer materials is corrosion resistance. However, the strength of polymer materials is relatively low compared to metals, so the use of plastic materials is limited in applications where applied loads become excessive, such as in automotive bearings.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

One aspect of the invention provides an engineered material comprising a microlattice formed of metal, and a low friction material disposed in the interstices of the metal microlattice. The low friction material has a coefficient of friction less than a coefficient of friction of the metal microlattice.

Another aspect of the invention provides a method of forming the engineered material. The method includes forming the microlattice of metal, and disposing the low friction material in the interstices of the metal microlattice.

The engineered material provides advantages of both metal and plastic simultaneously. The metal microlattice provides strength sufficient to withstand applied loads while requiring a relative low amount of metal, compared to conventional products used for the same application. Thus, the engineered material is more economical to manufacture compared to the conventional products. At the same time, the low friction material provides conformability and low friction. When the low friction material comprises a polymer, it also provides corrosion resistance and permits sliding against another surface with low force and low heat.

Another aspect of the invention provides a bearing formed of the engineered material, and a method of forming the bearing comprising the engineered material. The engineered material can be attached or bonded to another solid structure, for example a bronze or steel backing of the bearing. However, the engineered material is also strong enough to stand on its own. Thus, a bearing formed of the engineered material is capable of supporting applied loads with less metal and thus lower costs, compared to conventional bearings. In addition, the high amount of low friction material performs well in high speed and stop-start applications, eliminates the need for a

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100% polymer coating, and also allows the bearing to be machined without loss of performance.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Other advantages of the present invention will be readily appreciated, as the same becomes better understood by reference to the following detailed description when considered in connection with the accompanying drawings wherein:

FIG. 1 is a magnified view of an engineered material including a metal microlattice and low friction material according to an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 1A is an enlarged cross-sectional view of a portion of the engineered material of FIG. 1;

FIG. 2 is a bearing including the engineered material according to an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 3 illustrates a method of forming the engineered material according to an exemplary embodiment;

FIG. 4 illustrates the step of forming a template polymer microlattice;

FIG. 5 shows three exemplary template polymer microlattices formed by the step of FIG. 4;

FIG. 6 is a magnified view of a template polymer microlattice formed by the step of FIG. 4; and

FIG. 7 illustrates the metal microlattice prior to applying the low friction material according to an exemplary embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE ENABLING EMBODIMENT

Referring to the Figures, wherein like numerals indicate corresponding parts throughout the several views, an engineered material 20 providing high strength and low friction is generally shown in FIG. 1. The engineered material 20 can be used in a variety of applications requiring high strength and/or low friction, including automotive and non-automotive applications. The engineered material 20 includes a metal microlattice 22 providing strength to withstand applied loads, and a low friction material 24 disposed in interstices 26 of the metal microlattice 22 to provide conformability, low friction, and corrosion resistance.

The metal microlattice 22 is formed of metal; which can be any type of metal or metal alloy providing strength sufficient to withstand the loads encountered in the application for which the engineered material 20 is designed. In one exemplary embodiment, the engineered material 20 is designed to provide a sliding surface 28 of an automotive bearing 30, as shown in FIG. 2, and the metal microlattice 22 is formed of nickel or a nickel alloy. The metal microlattice 22 can be designed with high percentages of metal at the more highly loaded locations compared to the lightly loaded locations. The metal microlattice 22 can include one layer 32 of metal, or a plurality of layers 32 of metal, for example layers 32 of nickel, copper, and tin. The layers 32 can have the same composition as one another or different compositions. In one embodiment, when the layers 32 have different metal compositions, the metal layers 32 are alloyed together, for example by a heat treatment process.

As shown in FIG. 1, the metal microlattice 22 of the engineered material 20 comprises a plurality of struts 34 interconnected to one another and presenting a plurality of interstices 26. The metal microlattice 22 is typically present in an amount of approximately 5 to 25 volume % and the interstices 26 are present in an amount of approximately 75 to 95 volume %, based on the total volume of the metal microlattice 22 and the interstices 26. In the exemplary embodiment, the metal

microlattice **22** is present in an amount of 85 volume % and the interstices **26** are present in an amount of 15 volume %, based on the total volume of the metal microlattice **22** and the interstices **26**. Prior to applying the low friction material **24**, the interstices **26** are filled with air and thus the metal microlattice **22** is very light in weight and behaves similar to an elastomer. For example, when compressed, the metal microlattice **22** almost completely recovers to its original shape.

Each strut **34** of the metal microlattice **22** is typically disposed at an angle α of 50° to 90° relative to horizontal and has a diameter D in the micrometer range. In the exemplary embodiment, the diameter D of each strut **34** is about 50 micrometers. As shown in FIG. 1A, each of the struts **34** comprises a wall surrounding a center axis and presents an opening **38**, which may be hollow or alternatively filled with a template polymer. The wall thickness t surrounding the hollow opening **38** can be any thickness t in the micrometer range, for example 5 to 20 micrometers. In the exemplary embodiment, the wall thickness t is about 15 micrometers. The metal microlattice **22** can comprise a two dimensional or three dimensional structure. In one embodiment, the metal microlattice **22** comprises a three dimensional structure and presents a total thickness of about 100 μm to 5 cm.

The low friction material **24** preferably fills 100 volume % of the interstices **26**. The low friction material **24** has a coefficient of friction less than the coefficient of friction of the metal microlattice **22** and can comprise a variety of different materials. In the exemplary embodiment, the low friction material **24** is a polymer-based material including at least one of polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE), polyamideimide (PAI), polyetheretherketone (PEEK), polyethylene (PE), and polyoxymethylene (POM). The low friction material **24** can alternatively be formed of tin, lead, bismuth, or alloys thereof. In one embodiment, the low friction material **24** includes particles selected from the group consisting of ceramic, such as oxides, nitrides, phosphides, and carbides; graphite; boron nitride; molybdenum disulfide; copper; and silver. For example, hard particles can be added for wear resistance, lubricating particles can be added to further reduce friction. The particles can also include antimicrobial additives, such as Cu and/or Ag. Examples of commercially available low friction materials **24** include GLYCODUR®, G-92, and IROX®.

The engineered material **20** includes the metal microlattice **22** in an amount of 0.5 volume % to 90 volume % and the low friction material **24** in an amount of 10 volume % to 99.5 volume %, based on the combined total volume of the metal microlattice **22** and the low friction material **24**. However, the amount of low friction material **24** relative to the metal microlattice **22** can vary depending on the application and performance desired. In the exemplary embodiment, the engineered material **20** includes the metal microlattice **22** in an amount of 10 volume % to 50 volume %, and the low friction material **24** in an amount of 50 volume % to 90 volume %, based on the total volume of the metal microlattice **22** and low friction material **24**.

The engineered material **20** provides the advantages of both metal and plastic simultaneously. The metal microlattice **22** provides strength sufficient to withstand applied loads while requiring a relatively low amount of metal, compared to conventional products used for the same application. Thus, the engineered material **20** is more economical to manufacture compared to comparative conventional products. At the same time, the low friction material **24** provides conformability and low friction. When the low friction material **24** comprises a polymer, it also provides corrosion resistance and permits sliding against another surface with low force and low heat.

A wide variety of desired properties can be achieved by adjusting the composition of the metal and low friction material **24**, as well as the design of the metal microlattice **22**. Furthermore, the engineered material **20** can be attached or bonded to another solid structure, for example a bronze or steel backing **40** of the bearing **30**. However, the engineered material **20** is typically strong enough to stand on its own. The engineered material **20** is especially good for bearing applications, as the metal microlattice **22** supports the applied loads with less metal and thus lower costs, compared to conventional bearings. In addition, the high amount of low friction material **24** performs well in high speed and stop-start applications, eliminates the need for a 100% polymer coating, and also allows the bearing **30** to be machined without loss of performance.

Another aspect of the invention provides a method of forming the engineered material **20** by forming the microlattice of metal, and disposing the low friction material **24** in the interstices **26** of the metal microlattice **22**. FIG. 3 illustrates the method steps according to one exemplary embodiment.

The method of forming the engineered material **20** first includes preparing a template polymer microlattice **42** having a predetermined structure that will provide the structure of the finished metal microlattice **22**. The template polymer microlattice **42** is preferably formed from a ultra-violet (UV) curable resin, also referred to as a negative resist photomonomer. In the exemplary embodiment, as shown in FIG. 4, a reservoir **44** of the UV curable resin in liquid form is provided, and a perforated mask **46** is disposed over the reservoir **44**. The method next includes passing multiple beams of UV light **36** through the perforated mask **46** and into the reservoir **44**. The UV light **36** travels along predetermined paths, which depend on the desired structure of the template polymer microlattice **42** to be formed. The UV light **36** then transforms the liquid UV curable resin from UV-opaque to UV-transparent, and also from a liquid monomer to a solid polymer along the predetermined paths. The UV light beams **36** are able to penetrate deeper into the reservoir **44** along the solid polymer. The remaining liquid monomer beneath and in-line with the light beam **36** then transforms to solid polymer, thus self-propagating waveguide formation. By aligning the UV light beams **36** at different intersecting angles, a plurality of interconnected solid polymer fibers **48** are formed, which together form the template polymer microlattice **42**. The step of preparing the template polymer microlattice **42** is a continuous process which can occur at a rate greater than 1 mm^2 per minute.

FIG. 5 illustrates example designs of the template polymer microlattice **42** formed by the exemplary method, and FIG. 6 is a magnified view of a three dimensional template polymer microlattice **42** according to one exemplary embodiment. Typically, the solid polymer fibers **48** of the template polymer microlattice **42** each extend at an angle α of 50° to 90° relative to horizontal. The solid polymer fibers **48** are also spaced from one another and thus provide a plurality of interstices **26** therebetween. The template polymer microlattice **42** can comprise two or three dimensions, depending on the desired application or performance required. The template polymer microlattice **42** can also be formed or bent into various different shapes, depending on the application and performance desired.

The method next includes coating the template polymer microlattice **42** with the metal to form the metal microlattice **22**. As discussed above, any type of metal or metal alloy can be used to form the metal microlattice **22**. In the exemplary embodiment, the engineered material **20** is designed to provide the sliding surface **28** of the automotive bearing **30**, as

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shown in FIG. 2, and thus is formed of nickel or a nickel alloy. The step of coating the template polymer microlattice 42 can include plating or electrodepositing the metal onto the template polymer microlattice 42, or alternatively can comprise an electroless process. The coating step includes forming a plurality of the metal struts 34 surrounding the solid polymer fibers 48. The metal struts 34 are interconnected to one another and present the plurality of interstices 26 therebetween. Thus, the interconnected struts 34 form the metal microlattice 22 having a design matching the design of the template polymer microlattice 42. In one embodiment, the method includes forming a design with additional struts 34 or more closely spaced struts 34 in one area of the template polymer microlattice 42 relative to the other areas of the template polymer microlattice 42, and thus applying a greater amount of the metal to one area of the template polymer microlattice 42 relative to other areas of the template polymer microlattice 42. According to another embodiment, the method includes applying multiple layers 32 of the metal to the template polymer microlattice 42. For example, the method of FIG. 3 includes electroless plating a layer 32 of nickel, followed by electroplating a layer 32 of copper and then a layer 32 of tin, as shown in FIG. 1A.

The method optionally includes removing the template polymer microlattice 42 from the metal microlattice 22 by heating the template polymer microlattice 42. Various different methods can be used to remove the template polymer microlattice 42. For example, after coating the metal microlattice 22, the two microlattices 22, 42 can be heat treated to melt the template polymer microlattice 42. The template polymer microlattice 42 is then removed so that only the metal microlattice 22 remains. When the metal microlattice 22 includes multiple layers 32 of different metals, the heating step used to remove the template polymer microlattice 42 can simultaneously alloy the different metal layers 32 together. Alternatively, the step of alloying the different metal layers 32 together can be conducted after removing the template polymer microlattice 42. FIG. 7 illustrates the metal microlattice 22 after the template polymer microlattice 42 has been removed, according to one exemplary embodiment. In another embodiment, at least a portion of the template polymer microlattice 42 remains in the openings of the metal struts 34 and thus in the finished engineered material 20.

Prior to applying the low friction material 24 to the metal microlattice 22, the method can include attaching the metal microlattice 22 to another structure. For example, the method can include attaching the engineered material 20 to the backing 40 to form the bearing 30 of FIG. 2. Alternatively, the metal microlattice 22 can be used on its own.

The method next includes applying the low friction material 24 to the metal microlattice 22 and disposing the low friction material 24 in the interstices 26 of the metal microlattice 22 to form the engineered material 20. The metal microlattice 22 acts as a skeleton, providing support and strength, while the low friction material 24 provides a conforming, low friction surface. The step of applying the low friction material 24 can include rolling the low friction material 24 onto the metal microlattice 22, or infiltrating the low friction material 24 into the interstices 26 of the metal microlattice 22. The low friction material 24 is preferably applied so that it fills 100 volume % of the total volume of the interstices 26.

After applying the template polymer microlattice 42, the method can include machining the engineered material 20 to the desired dimensions. The method can also include applying the engineered material 20 to another component, such as the backing 40 of the bearing 30. If the low friction material

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24 includes a polymer, then method can include sintering the engineered material 20 to promote cross-linking of the polymer. Typically, due to the high amount of low friction material 24, no additional polymer coating is required, such as when the engineered material 20 is used as the sliding surface 28 of the bearing 30.

The finished engineered material 20 can be used in various automotive applications in addition to bearings, such as gaskets, seals, and wipers. Alternatively, the engineered material 20 can be used in non-automotive applications requiring high strength and low friction.

Obviously, many modifications and variations of the present invention are possible in light of the above teachings and may be practiced otherwise than as specifically described while within the scope of the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. An engineered material, comprising:

a microlattice formed of metal, said metal microlattice presenting a plurality of interstices;

a low friction material disposed in said interstices of said metal microlattice;

said low friction material having a coefficient of friction less than a coefficient of friction of said metal microlattice; and

wherein said metal microlattice is present in an amount of approximately 15 volume % and said interstices are present in an amount of approximately 85 volume %, based on the total volume of said metal microlattice and said interstices;

said metal microlattice is formed of nickel;

said metal microlattice comprises a plurality of struts interconnected to one another and presenting said interstices; each of said struts includes a hollow opening;

each of said struts is disposed at an angle of 50° to 90° relative to horizontal, has a diameter of about 50 micrometers, and a wall thickness of about 15 micrometers surrounding said hollow opening;

said low friction material filling said interstices;

said low friction material including at least one of polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE), polyamide (PAI), polyetheretherketone (PEEK), polyethylene (PE), polyoxymethylene (POM), tin, and bismuth; and

said low friction material including particles selected from the group consisting of ceramic, graphite molybdenum disulfide, copper, and silver.

2. The engineered material of claim 1, wherein said low friction material includes polyamide (PAI).

3. The engineered material of claim 2, wherein said added particles include at least one of graphite and molybdenum disulfide.

4. The engineered material of claim 1, wherein said low friction material includes a cross-linked polymer.

5. The engineered material of claim 1, wherein said metal microlattice includes a plurality of different metal layers alloyed together.

6. The engineered material of claim 1, wherein said metal microlattice presents a thickness of about 100 μm to 5 cm.

7. A bearing, comprising:

an engineered material including a microlattice formed of metal, said metal microlattice including a plurality of struts interconnected to one another and forming a three-dimensional structure;

each of said struts of said metal microlattice including a wall surrounding an opening;

said struts of said metal microlattice presenting a plurality of interstices;

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said interstices being present in an amount of 75 to 95 volume percent (%), based on the total volume of said metal microlattice;

said engineered material further including a low friction material disposed in said interstices of said metal microlattice, 5

said low friction material having a coefficient of friction less than the coefficient of friction of said metal microlattice, and

wherein said metal microlattice is present in an amount of approximately 15 volume % and said interstices are present in an amount of approximately 85 volume %, based on the total volume of said metal microlattice and said interstices; 10

said metal microlattice is formed of nickel;

each of said struts is disposed at an angle of 50° to 90° relative to horizontal, has a diameter of about 50 micrometers, and a wall thickness of about 15 micrometers surrounding said opening; 15

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said low friction material fills said interstices;

said low friction material includes at least one of polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE), polyamide (PAI), polyetheretherketone (PEEK), polyethylene (PE), polyoxymethylene (POM), tin, and bismuth; and

said low friction material includes particles selected from the group consisting of ceramic, graphite molybdenum disulfide, copper, and silver.

8. The bearing of claim 7 including a backing attached to said engineered material, and wherein said engineered material presents a sliding surface without a coating of polymer material applied to said engineered material.

9. The bearing of claim 7, wherein one area of said metal microlattice includes a greater amount of said metal relative to other areas of said metal microlattice.

10. The bearing of claim 7, wherein said metal microlattice presents a thickness of about 100 μm to 5 cm.

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